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Riots Summary

March 3, 1992 marked the beginning a downward spiral of racial tension that would end close to a year later when chaos broke out in the streets of South Central Los Angeles, yet again. After leading officers of the Los Angeles Police Department on a high speed chase, Rodney Glenn King was hand cuffed, stun gunned, and brutally beaten by four officers. Even with video evidence of the vicious crime the officers were acquitted and set free. Within the next week the city was engulfed in flames and ran by violence. After the National Guard was called in, the smoke began to clear but the city was not the same. Over 2,000 people were injured and close to 60 lost their lives. In 1965 not even thirty years before the ‘92 riots, civilians were victimized by the same corrupt institution. Marquette Frye was pulled over for a vehicle infraction and mistreated by police officers. Resisting arrest he quickly began to catch the attention of those passing by. One by one the crowd began to grow quickly became enraged resulting in riots in Los Angeles’s Watt’s neighborhood. Both the Watts Riots and the 1992 LA Riots were very similar in nature showing the racial tension between those who walked the streets and those whose job it is to protect them. In both stories there was an event that sparked a powder keg of racial injustice waiting to explode.

There didn’t seem to be much change in the inner city from the 60’s through to the 90’s compared the suburbs in the same three decades. Suburbs had better schools, more funding and in general there were much more opportunities for “white America”. There was an uneven spread of power, money, and social status. Inner city residents were stuck in a perpetual cycle of poverty with no way out and no real hopes for progress. In the ‘92 Riots, Rodney King was seen as a poster child, representing countless African Americans who have been mistreated by the police. However even after what seemed to be sufficient evidence against the officers, the video prove to be futile. The mayor of Los Angeles said, “Today, the system failed us.” Even higher ranking officials were able to recognize the injustice and there was nothing that was able to be done. Racial tension had ripped a gap between the two cultures and there was nothing to stitch them together.

In the case of the 1992 riots there were not too many long lasting effects. There were many victims and fires left thousands homeless. Civilians were left shell shocked with no hope for change. There was a perpetual mistrust of the law enforcement which still lasts to this day. Coverage of the events showed Americans across the country the violence from a first person view and brought to life the racism the held true in the mind of many Americans. Three years after the Watts riots Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Fair Housing Act to clearly prohibit the publication of discriminatory real estate advertisements. There were efforts to try to narrow the gap.

Both of the riots showed the true colors of society at the time. There was a constant stream of racial tension, anger, and lack of equal opportunity. There was no hope for those stuck in the poverty cycle. Both cases brought to life how desperate people were to let their voice be heard even if it were through violence. The Watts riots occurred during the Civil Rights Movement, a time when violence was breaking out in other major cities (i.e. Detroit, Newark) throughout the country. This behavior, seen across the country, differed from the 1992 riots. In 1992, LA became a small sample of the discrimination experienced throughout the country that was sparked by a singular event. Instead of violence erupting across the country it was focused in one city. But in both cases one thing holds true; racism prevails.